

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00

NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05

IO-10 /070 W

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R 010518Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2371

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMCONSUL UDORN

AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI

DIA WASHDC

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 VIENTIANE 0751

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS, LA

SUBJ: SITUATION REPORT ON BAN HOUEI SAI

REF: VIENTIANE A-004, JANUARY 22

BEGIN SUMMARY: FIVE WEEKS AFTER THE OCCUPATION OF BAN HOUEI SAI, THE SITUATION THERE AND IN SURROUNDING HOUA KHONG PROVINCE REMAINS TENUOUS. PATHET LAO TROOPS ARE STILL IN THE AREA, ALTHOUGH LESS VISIBLE THAN BEFORE IN THE TOWN ITSELF, AND LPF ADMINISTRATIVE PRESENCE IS GROWING. ON VIENTIANE SIDE, MR-I DEPUTY COMMANDER GENERAL VANNASENG REPRESENTS ONLY ELEMENT OF COHESION AND IS SLOWLY RESTORING A SEMBLANCE OF FAR COMMAND IN TOWN. FAR UNITS ARE SAID TO BE BACK TO ABOUT TWO-THIRDS OF PRE-OCCUPATION STRENGTH, BUT ALMOST HALF OF THE SUB-DIVISION'S M-16S CANNOT BE ACCOUNTED FOR. MOST DISTURBING ASPECT IS TOTAL LACK OF VIENTIANE SIDE CIVIL ADMINISTRATION. OFFICIALS WHO FLED AT OUTSET OF OCCUPATION HAVE NOT BEEN REPLACED, AND THERE WAS ADVERSE LOCAL REACTION TO PGNU'S PLAN (NOW APPARENTLY ABANDONED) TO  
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ASSIGN JUST-FIRED GOVERNOR OF KHAMMOUANE PROVINCE AS

NEW GOVERNOR OF HOUA KHONG. END SUMMARY.

1. THE FOLLOWING IS A COLLATION OF INFORMATION FROM USAID AREA COORDINATOR AT BAN HOUET SAI (BHS) AND DAO REPRESENTATIVES WHO HAVE RECENTLY VISITED BHS AND MR-I HQ IN LUANG PRABANG.

2. AS OF LATE JANUARY, PATHET LAO TROOPS ARE STILL IN BHS AREA AND SOMETIMES IN TOWN ITSELF. EVEN WHEN IN CIVILIAN CLOTHES, THEY ARE READILY IDENTIFIABLE TO LOCAL INHABITANTS. IN ADDITION, SMALL PL UNITS ARE BELIEVED TO BE OCCUPYING POSITIONS WHICH THEY SEIZED DECEMBER 24 UP AND DOWN THE MEKONG. MR-I HEADQUARTERS CLAIMED AS EARLY AS JANUARY 15 TO HAVE REOCCUPIED ALL SUCH POSITIONS, BUT WE DO NOT ACCEPT THESE CLAIMS; FAR OFFICERS OPERATING OUT OF BHS HAVE NOT YET ATTEMPTED TO VISIT MOST OF THE POSITIONS.

3. IN ADDITION, SMALL PATHET LAO PROPAGANDA TEAMS CONTINUE TO OPERATE IN BHS AND REPORTEDLY IN OTHER RIVER VILLAGES AS WELL. DURING HOUSE-TO-HOUSE SURVEYS, THEY CLAIM PL FORCES JOINED IN DECEMBER 24 ACTION AT REQUEST OF DISSIDENT LEADER CAPTAIN CHANGSOUK "TO PROVIDE SECURITY FOR HIS TROOPS" OR THAT PL MISSION IS TO GUARD AGAINST POSSIBLE "INVASION" BY KMT OR BY TROOPS OF GENERAL PHOUMI NOSAVAN.

4. LPF PROPAGANDA CONTINUES TO BUILD UP CAPTAIN CHANGSOUK AS A "NEW REVOLUTIONARY LEADER" AND ONLY MAN ON SCENE WHO DARED TO STAND UP AGAINST CORRUPT ELEMENTS FORMERLY IN CONTROL OF CIVIL AND MILITARY APPARATUS IN BHS.

5. IN FACT, HOWEVER, DISSIDENTS THEMSELVES ARE NOT ABOVE CORRUPT PRACTICES. THE SO-CALLED "REVOLUTIONARY GROUP FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE," INCLUDING CHANGSOUK HIMSELF, AN EX-LIF OFFICER NAMED KHAMSAEN, "STUDENTS" THAVON, SAKDY AND SOMDY AND ACTING CHAO KHOUENG KHONGPHAENG, MADE AGREEMENTS WITH EIGHT SAWMILLS IN HOUA KHONG PROVINCE TO ALLOW FOR UNABATED EXPORT OF LUMBER AND WILL REPORTEDLY COLLECT SEVEN MILLION KIP TO PAY FOR "REVOLUTIONARY" EXPENSES. MEMBERS OF THE GROUP BROKE INTO CUSTOMS OFFICE  
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AND FORCED A LOCAL ASSISTANT TO DOCUMENT THE NECESSARY FORMS. FOR SEVERAL DAYS IN MID-JANUARY, LUMBER MOVED ACROSS THE MEKONG BY TRUCK AND BARGE AT AN UNPRECEDENTED RATE.

6. LOCAL REACTION WAS ONE OF BEWILDERMENT AND DEPRESSION AT BEING SO BLATANTLY DUPED BY THE "JUSTICE GROUP," WHICH WAS SUPPOSED TO CLEANSE THE LOCAL PGNU OF CORRUP-

TION. THE SEVEN MILLION KIP WILL REPORTEDLY BE DISTRIBUTED AMONG "JUSTICE GROUP" MEMBERS AND THE LPF.

7. MR-I DEPUTY COMMANDER GENERAL (TIAO) VANNASENG IS SPENDING MUCH OF HIS TIME IN BHS AND FUNCTIONING AS DE FACTO SUB-DIVISION COMMANDER. HE IS ATTEMPTING TO REFORM STRAGGLERS INTO FAR UNITS, INVENTORY WEAPONS, AND OTHERWISE RESTRUCTURE THE HOUA KHONG SUB-DIVISION. APPARENTLY THROUGH NEGOTIATIONS, HE HAS OBTAINED RETURN OF TWO ARTILLERY PIECES AND SEVERAL RECOILLESS RIFLES WHICH PATHET LAO TOOK FROM BHS TO BAN POUNG AT OUTSET OF OCCUPATION.

8. NOMINAL COMMANDER OF BHS SUB-DIVISION IS COLONEL KHAMCHANH PANPOVONG, WHO WAS HASTILY NAMED TO POSITION DECEMBER 25. COLONEL KHAMCHANH SERVED PREVIOUSLY IN BHS AND MOST RECENTLY AS SPORTS AND TRAINING OFFICER AT MR-I HQ IN LUANG PRABANG. IT IS NOT YET CLEAR WHETHER HE WILL PROVE ACCEPTABLE TO DISSIDENTS, AND IN ANY CASE HE TAKES BACK SEAT WHETHER OR NOT GENERAL VANNASENG IS IN RESIDENCE; WHEN GENERAL VANNASENG LEAVES BHS, HE SEND IN MR-I G-2, COLONEL CHANPHENG, AS SUBSTITUTE. (LATTER IS IN OUR OPINION BEST CANDIDATE FOR SUB-DIVISION COMMAND BUT PROBABLY COULD NOT BE PERSUADED TO ACCEPT IT.)

9. GENERAL VANNASENG HAS APPARENTLY MADE CAPTAIN CHANGSOUK THE ACTING DEPUTY SUB-DIVISION COMMANDER AND CAPTAIN BOUNPHENG, ANOTHER DISSIDENT COMPANY COMMANDER, THE DEPUTY G-4, THUS SATELLITING THESE TWO MEN ON THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT STAFF FUNCTIONS. FURTHERMORE, THEIR TWO COMPANIES AND THE SUB-DIVISION HEADQUARTERS COMPANY ARE STILL THE ONLY FAR UNITS IN BHS.

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10. GENERAL VANNASENG CLAIMS THAT STRENGTH OF SUB-DIVISION'S THREE BATTALIONS AND HEADQUARTERS ELEMENTS NOW STANDS AT 1,029 MEN, AS AGAINST AN AUTHORIZED FIGURE FOR RICE-RATION ISSUANCE OF 1,319. (HOWEVER, MR-I G-2 PUT PRESENT-FOR-DUTY STRENGTH AT ONLY 566 AS OF JANUARY 20.) A MORE TELLING INDICATION OF FAR DISINTEGRATION IN AREA IS REPORT THAT ONLY 570 M-16 RIFLES ARE ACCOUNTED FOR AND IN HANDS OF AUTHORIZED UNITS, WHEREAS 542 M-16S ARE UNACCOUNTED FOR. WE SUSPECT THAT SOME OF THESE WEAPONS HAVE GONE TO BUYERS IN THAILAND AND BURMA AND THAT OTHERS ARE IN PATHET LAO HANDS.

11. WHATEVER GENERAL VANNASENG'S WEAKNESSES, HE IS RIGHT NOW THE ONLY COHESIVE FORCE THE VIENTIANE SIDE HAS IN BHS. CIVIL ADMINISTRATION HAS HAD NO HIGHER-LEVEL AT-

TENTION SINCE DECMEBER 28, WHEN MINISTER OF INTERIOR  
PHENG PHONGSAVAN CAME FOR THREE HOURS TO NEGOTIATE WITH  
DISSIDENTS. NOT ONE OF THE CIVIL SERVANTS WHO FLED BHS  
LAST MONTH HAS YET BEEN REPLACED.

12. MEMBERS OF HOUA KHONG ASSOCIATION, STUDENTS AND  
BHS TOWNSPEOPLE IN GENERAL REACTED NEGATIVELY WHEN PGNU  
ANNOUNCED IT WOULD APPOINT BOUNLIENG CHOUNRAMANY AS NEW  
GOVERNOR OF HOUA KHONG. HE IS WIDELY REGARED AS INEPT  
AND MORE CORRUPT THAN MOST, AND BHS RESIDENTS ARE OF  
COURSE AWARE THAT HE WAS REMOVED AS GOVERNOR OF  
KHAMMOUANE PROVINCE EARLIER THIS MONTH WHEN DISTURBANCES  
BROKE OUT IN THAKHEK. SOME RESIDENTS BELIEVED HE WOULD  
NOT "DARE" TO COME TO BHS; OTHERS CLAIMED THAT IF HE  
CAME IT WOULD BE ONLY A MATTER OF TIME BEFORE BHS SAW  
ITS NEXT STRIKE AND RENEWED VIOLENCE. PHENG PHONGSAVAN  
NOW SAYS PGNU WILL APPOINT SOMEONE ELSE BUT WOULD NOT  
IDENTIFY NOMINEE.

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NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-10

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 VIENTIANE 0751

13. MEANWHILE, LPF "ADMINISTRATION" IS ACTIVE IN AND  
AROUND BHS AND SEEMS ON POINT OF FILLING "LEADERSHIP  
VACUUM" LEFT BY VIENTIANE SIDE. APART FROM CONDUCTING

HOUSEHOLD SURVEYS AS MENTIONED ABOVE, LPF HAS ESTABLISHED A DISPENSARY AT PHOU PAH DENG, BUILT A GRANARY IN ANOTHER VILLAGE, INSTITUTED RESTRICTIONS ON VILLAGERS' MOVEMENTS TO AND FROM FIELDS, AND TRIED TO ENTICE REFUGEES TO RETURN TO LPF ZONE.

14. THROUGH MECHANISM OF JCCIA, LPF HAS ALREADY OPENED ROAD FROM BHS TO NAM THA TO CIVILIAN TRAFFIC (WITH LPF PERMITS REQUIRED) AND HAS NOW REPORTEDLY OPENED THE MEKONG TO TRAFFIC BETWEEN XIENG KOK (PD 7212) AND PAK BENG. THE REMAINING STRETCH OF RIVER FROM PAK BENG TO LUANG PRABANG WILL EVIDENTLY BE NEGOTIATED ELSEWHERE. OPENING OF THESE LOCS WAS ONE OF DISSIDENTS' DEMANDS IN DECEMBER.

15. COMMENT: RANKING VIENTIANE SIDE OFFICIALS PROFESS TO BELIEVE THAT SITUATION THERE IS SOMEHOW RETURNING TO NORMAL OF ITS OWN ACCORD, WITHOUT REPLACEMENT OF CIVILIAN  
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ADMINISTRATORS. IN FACT, GENERAL VANNASENG'S LIMITED EFFORTS AND SOME USAID-SUPPORTED SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS CONSTITUTE ONLY VISIBLE GOVERNMENTAL ACTIVITY ON THE VIENTIANE SIDE. UNLESS VIENTIANE SIDE HAS DECIDED TO WRITE OFF HOUA KHONG PROVINCE, IT NEEDS TO GET MOVING. WE WILL CONTINUE TO MAKE THIS POINT IN OUR CONTACTS WITH VIENTIANE SIDE LEADERS.

16. WE ARE STILL WAITING FOR SITUATION TO BECOME CLEARER BEFORE MAKING DECISION ON OUR AID EFFORT IN THE AREA. EXCEPT FOR SCHOOL-BUILDING, IT IS AT STANDSTILL FOR TIME BEING.  
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